

Testimony in support of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination.

To the members of the hearing committee:

I thank you for your time for reading my written testimony. My name is Kurt Love, Ph.D. I am a lifelong resident of Connecticut. I currently reside in Bristol. I received my preK-Ph.D. education exclusively in Connecticut. I am a graduate of UCONN, and I currently work as an assistant professor and the coordinator for the Secondary Division at Central Connecticut State University in the Teacher Education Department. I am writing to you both as a professor and a father of a 7-month old daughter.

This is a state with a recent unique history with current issues of social justice and civil rights. Civil Rights has been a 100-year struggle beginning in the early 1900s with voices like W.E.B. DuBois and Carter Woodson bringing our attention to social inequalities for Black Americans in society and in schools. Sadly, social injustices and inequalities with schools and *de facto* residential segregation persist making Connecticut only second to Mississippi in terms of racial segregation.

However, in recent years, the Connecticut justice system and State Legislature has made profound and surprisingly just decisions in providing same sex couples the legal right to marry in our state. Where other states have come up severely short with policies of equity for same-sex couples, we have shown a willingness to address inequalities directly. This serves as a beacon of hope for all peoples of all backgrounds. This is commendable on the part of Connecticut lawmakers. Supporting peoples rights is truly at the core of making policy, and its importance cannot be understated.

Gender neutrality is easily missed by those who live a life within the social norms of gender. Transgender peoples have lived as outcasts since the dawn of consciousness in Western societies. As a result, many transgender people live in constant fear of being physically assaulted, emotionally dismantled, or worse. As a society, these shameful forms of abuse and persecution have yet to be addressed in clear language in legislation. Race, age, disability, and male/female gender discrimination are not the only forms that exist. Clearly, gender neutrality for the sake of transgender people needs to be explicitly present in legal policy.

Oppositional arguments to being inclusive of gender neutral language are arguments that have persisted since pre-Civil War. Those that use their religious backgrounds to perpetuate arguments of social inequalities clearly distort meanings of fairness, justice, and morality. Whether it is "God Hates Fags," or "Homosexuality is a disease that can be medically and psychologically treated," these arguments are perpetuating a violence against groups of people, and these are forms of intimidation and bullying that should not be given legitimacy.

Additionally, I want to provide a brief summary of the arguments in academia around gender. I teach about issues of diversity in both undergraduate and graduate level courses. I also sit on the university-wide Faculty Senate Diversity Committee at CCSU. Judith Butler, who is well respected in the community, argued that gender is not only a social construction, but it is also a constant performance of adhering to social norms. As the social norms shift, so do social

behaviors. The current mainstream construction of female, for instance, has certainly been shifting over the last 60 years, and women are “allowed” to be leaders in society in roles that were once only granted to men. Even though gender exists along a spectrum, we have historically constructed gender along a male/female binary leaving transgender people as outcasts. Legislation has historically constructed gender as only male or female, which perpetuates social injustices to those who do not identify in themselves within the confines of the male/female binary.

If legislators only self-identify as being appropriately placed within the binary of “male/female” identities, then overlooking transgender experiences can occur easily and routinely due to their own social privileges. Just as a White, affluent person can overlook experiences of working poor Black or Latino Americans right in their own backyards, males/females who hold office can overlook the experiences of transgender peoples.

Providing peoples of all backgrounds with an equal opportunity is the core principle of lawmakers. Providing gender neutrality in legislation and explicitly identifying discrimination against people regarding gender is not acceptable. Transgender people need the protection of the law just as any other people, and clarity in the language of the law is the primary way of making this possible.

Lastly, as a father of 7-month old daughter, I want her to live in a world that is truly fair, just, and safe regardless of the identities that she forms as she gets older. As a father, I see how gender identities are thrust upon her by family members, especially. Gender expectations are very high and they start as soon as someone is born. At the very least, policy should avoid perpetuating this process.

Thank you for your time,
Kurt Love, Ph.D.

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